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Collection Development: In Response to Issues Raised at the Janus Conference, Cornell, October 2005

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I left the library the other evening to dig my car out of the snow and join the line headed into the mist. It's the darkest time of the year. Do they know where they're going? Do I want to go there too?

A first real snow is a wonderful sort of thing. It is cold and I don't like cold. But it is also exciting and extremely beautiful. Landmarks are obscured—there's a basic plan—you can tell that. Roads head off in a direction you think you'll probably be happy with. But it's difficult to see where you're going and you can't see any street signs.

That is how I've felt about Collection Development lately. Is the basic plan still there?

I think we don't know. And we should just admit we don't know. We're moving along, sticking largely to the rules we're familiar with—and trying to guess what we will find under all that snow once it melts.

Janus Conference

In October, Cornell held a gathering—a small one, with time for people to talk and to think—mostly C.D. people from larger ARL libraries—intended as a starting point from which to encourage discussion of broader collaborative action.

Invoking Janus, participants will look behind us and look ahead, and assess the library's role as interface between reader and writer in the first decades of the 21st century.

The conference brought the major issues to the table all at once—a useful way to see them clearly. I came away thinking that our real task is to put in place the infrastructure of the new research library—no single library or group of libraries can do this. But, as a profession and working with chosen partners in publishing and other fields, we could do this. Groups were formed to work on “Action Statements” for debate within the larger Collection Development community at ALA Midwinter.

The conference left me feeling better about Collection Development; and I want to use this column to write about it. I am putting down my own thoughts rather than reporting on the conference. Some of the Action Statements are too long to incorporate—so I am paraphrasing those statements—quite likely to the point where their authors might not like them any more.

Action Statements

RECON—or “Convert to digital form objects currently available only in traditional formats.”

The RECON group predicts traditional resources lacking digital shadow-selves will be lonely.

Why convert? Scholarly communication is more and more a digital pursuit. While traditional formats will retain a place, their roles

will be increasingly specialized. This environment will force libraries to provide access to most holdings electronically. We need to ensure that legacy collections, as well as newly purchased traditional resources, not be “lost.” Hybrid collections, split among digital and analog formats, will not be successful.

This is really interesting—especially the “hybrid collections will not be successful” statement. I had not thought about it quite that way, but it's right. Even diligent researchers can be inundated with sources they need to master or at least check. When there are more than anyone can cope with online, is it reasonable to expect them to go on to check print-only sources? Maybe, when writing a dissertation or working on the sort of topic Institutional Review Boards are, rightly, very nervous about—where people can die if you get it wrong. I am tired of hearing that students, scholars, etc., have grown lazy. This is just another version of “When I was a boy I walked ten miles through the snow to get to school.”

The Action Statement (but in my words) advocates that we:

plan a national (coordinated, standards-based, cost effective) digitization project for North American research library holdings—a plan with a structure that ensures active support from institutions whose backing is needed. Seek grant support, but assume the library community as primary source of funding. Take into account projects already in place and involve those participating in planning this more global effort. Each library holds unique or regionally scarce materials, digital versions of which will benefit scholars everywhere.

When catalogs went online, we converted catalogs. Now we are retrospectively converting collections. There is nothing new about this. We have works like the 1960s Van Cliburn Moscow performance of the Tchaikovsky Second Piano Concerto as a 33 rpm, a cassette tape, a compact disc, a videotape, and a DVD. Now we have Classical Music Library too. And we are continuing to buy CDs and DVDs.

Libraries took on the bulk of the work in catalog conversion. With collections, it hasn't often been feasible for libraries to convert from older to newer formats—we have mostly purchased the new or resigned ourselves to owning a lot of not-very-usable stuff.

In this new world, a collection is much more than the total of the texts in it. I especially like the way Dennis Dillon (University of Texas) put it—“I am finding it increasingly unfruitful to consider the acquisition of a title apart from the means of discovery and access.” In this context, what that means is that—except to retrieve an item which is from a known item search—we cannot truly share the collections we purchase.

Will Google do the conversion for us? I certainly hope so. There's too much to do if libraries and publishers have to do it all. And, of course, they have a better search engine for much of “our” material. Let's admit libraries already rely on Google, and get on with converting the stuff

that Google can't do well—or which needs special handling or added features that librarians understand and Google doesn't.

As an obvious sort of example—but there are many others outside Special Collections areas—take the early weekly newspapers from small communities across Utah. Much of the work involves finding them, getting Preservation to clean them up enough to scan, checking our microfilm masters to see if they're usable—Google isn't going to do that. A publisher might—but I don't want to buy a collection all the libraries in my state need, but which many can't afford. It's a better investment to do it ourselves or with partners, and be able to share with scholars, historians, grade school kids and anyone who might want to think about how people lived in Utah in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Attendees at the conference were asked in a straw poll if they thought it might be feasible to put 10 percent of the materials budget into such a national project. About two-thirds said yes. It did bother me that the reason most frequently cited as to why it might be hard to do this had nothing to do with library users. Rather, it was that the Subject Selectors might be mad at having their budgets cut.

PROCON—Ensuring future publications are in digital form.

Research libraries are committed to moving to an environment in the medium term future (e.g., by the end of the decade), in which most newly published materials are acquired in digital form. Research libraries will work with scholars, publishers, and each other in order to achieve this. Research libraries agree to shift to e-only by 2008 for those publications that are available in both print and electronic form including: journals, reference books, textbooks, government documents and other areas like electronic books as the electronic publishing models develop. A complete transition to digital form by 2008 is dependent on the existence of trusted archives for digital content.

Right on. We're losing content that has not been preserved yet in either print or electronic format. So how can it be sensible to try to preserve the printed legacy in two formats?

When people want to read a book, let's print it. There is no technological reason to print it, bind it, store it, and then maybe have to mail heavy objects half-way across the country to a reader. We've talked for a long time about the Just in Time collection. We're getting closer to it being feasible to do it.

Licensing Principles

Research libraries will make every effort to sign no licenses that include non-disclosure clauses, and to share among themselves the terms of agreements with all publishers. Public universities shall publicly post licenses and business terms on their Web sites. Research libraries will make every effort to ensure that licenses include such options as the right to use publications with course management software, the right to use publications for e-reserve, the right to fulfill ILL requests according to existing ILL guidelines and the right of authors to retain copyright and make their publications available in Open Access repositories or other archives. Research libraries will make every effort to ensure that licenses include provisions for perpetual access and archival deposit of licensed content.

YES! We can do this, all of us, right now. It does have labor costs attached for negotiation—but some of those are (in a funny sort of way) one-time rather than ongoing costs—if we were to very, very firmly announce that none of us will sign any contracts that do not

meet these standards—and then of course we'd have to do it—we could stop spending expensive staff and lawyer time talking about the same things over and over again.

This discussion also brought up the topic of negotiating price ceilings and refusing to pay more. Libraries didn't think we could find consensus on this just now. Pity. Still, it is refreshing to hear it considered—and to see the discussion in terms of price ceilings—which doesn't imply, in the same way that talking about "capping price increases" does—that the current exorbitant price is okay and we just have to stop it from going up.

Archiving Ensure the coordinated, long-term maintenance of traditional and digital holdings.

We need to know with a high degree of certainty that we will have copies of library materials when we need them—that they won't have gone missing altogether, be held in print but at places that won't share, or be in an electronic format that no longer is easily accessible.

We know that there are going to be a great many new formats. If we spend all our time and funding thinking about how to preserve old formats, we will pay insufficient attention to what is being created now—and we cannot afford to do that.

Print Archiving Building on initiatives underway or under discussion—research libraries will create a working group to develop models for coordinated archiving at the national level. Develop a process for identifying vulnerable print holdings, develop business planning models, and support print archiving efforts currently underway.

Digital Archiving. Endorsing Don Waters' Urgent Action Needed to Preserve Scholarly Electronic Journals:

1. Preservation of electronic journals is a kind of insurance.
2. Qualified archives must provide a minimal set of well-defined services.
3. Libraries must invest in a qualified archiving solution.
4. Libraries demand archival deposit by publishers as a condition for licensing. And, added by the Janus Group:
5. Encourage a broad range of academic and research libraries to affiliate with an appropriate repository.

To escalate the development of a network of repositories within the next five years, create a working group that will create an inventory of ongoing digital archiving activities, agree on the definition of a certifiable repository; participate in developing long-term digital solutions (Portico, KB, LOCKSS), and reach out to the publishing community to form partnerships, and negotiate new alliances, to SSP, AAUP; and other publishing groups.

This can be accomplished if everyone sets his mind to it. I do myself find it increasingly difficult to be frantic with worry over the major journals—or, for that matter, the output of any current major publisher—when you have some hundreds of print copies and libraries are (slowly) getting organized to be sure print back runs are collected—and the digital files are mirrored in several locations and will be a focus of concern for the major archiving initiatives.

The stuff at risk includes great quantities of material from small scholarly societies. It is difficult even to remember the names of many of them—like the *Proceedings of AMINTOPHIL*—the American Section of the International Association for Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Law. I worry more about that stuff than I do about the American Chemical Society.

We don't want to recreate the National Geographic phenomena in electronic format—everyone scrambling to save copies of titles that bring out our natural hoarding tendencies—while more obscure stuff—small journals, technical papers, conference proceedings, poetry journals, privately published books, local things, get lost.

New models of scholarly communication Create a network of publishing structures that scholars can use as a supplement or alternative to standard scholarly publishing channels.

Research libraries will identify existing scholarly communication efforts that model basic characteristics of a good disciplinary repository. Working with key players in a chosen field, each library will use these models to develop a repository that ensures access to existing resources and preservation and jump starts new models of scholarship. Key players may include scholarly societies, university presses, foundations, interdisciplinary institutes and think tanks, and strong advocates on campus. Functionality will include aspects scholars require, such as peer review. Libraries will assume the risk for success and failure. The materials budget will serve as venture capital, with a recommended minimum annual investment of \$50,000. The repository should be considered a long term investment and not be expected to produce immediate payoff.

Much as I like this statement (I was in the group that wrote it)—it can use translation.

What does this mean? It means we find groups invested in and knowledgeable about a discipline and its needs. Maybe groups that are publishing, or maybe just groups of faculty or other special interest and expert groups that form a community around a given topic. Maybe a society with a bundle of journals, a university press with a monographic series, a strong academic department with a commitment to Open Access, a commercial publisher with reasonably priced stuff—take all this stuff and you federate and curate it and preserve it. And expand it and build in the new capabilities that a new generation of scholars will dream up.

The system of scholarly communication is widely believed to be a closed one. All the money that is going to be in the system is there now—I suspect that this is right. We have to build capacity and retain budget flexibility so that when we figure out what the new stuff looks like, we haven't so tied ourselves up with the old stuff that we lack the ability to respond.

I have worried of late about whether our academic library systems are truly worth what they cost our parent institutions. If we can make progress on some of these Action Statements, we can produce a library system that is indeed worth what it costs, both to our individual schools and to society as a whole. ■